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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000530

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [SY](#) [IS](#) [IR](#) [LE](#)  
SUBJECT: LEBANON: MARCH 14 MP HARB FEARS IRANIAN  
INFLUENCE, SAYS AOUN "NAIVE"

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.

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(b) and (d)

SUMMARY

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11. (C) In a May 11 meeting, March 14 MP Boutros Harb told Ambassador that the Iranian presence, through Hizballah, created a situation in Lebanon worse than when Syria was in control. He warned that Lebanon could not survive in this present state of affairs. Harb called Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) leader Michel Aoun "naive" about his relationship with Hizballah, and speculated that Aoun would be gone when Hizballah determined he was no longer useful. Harb hoped President Michel Sleiman would display more leadership on issues important to the country, saying Sleiman needed the "right moment" to shine.

12. (C) Harb cautioned that March 14 and Future Movement leader Saad Hariri was "inexperienced" and "did not have the best people advising him." Harb noted that in contrast, Hizballah's lists of candidates were meant to ensure that aggressive "commanders" are elected. Harb was confident about winning his own MP seat in Batroun. He mentioned a "change in mood" by voters about Aoun in the villages of Batroun, strengthening March 14. Harb warned that in Keserwan, the Maronite Patriarch needed to work harder supporting March 14 candidates. End summary.

LEBANON'S PROBLEM IS HIZBALLAH'S ARMS

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13. (C) In a May 11 meeting at his residence, MP Boutros Harb told the Ambassador, accompanied by PolMilOff, that Hizballah's arms and its Iranian supporters would destroy Lebanon if things did not change. He was despondent about Iran's involvement, through Hizballah, in Lebanon's internal politics. He believed Iranian involvement was a situation "worse than when Syria was here." Harb warned that Lebanon could not survive if controlled by Hizballah's threats and use of force.

14. (C) Harb condemned "crazy" Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun as "naive" in his relationship with Hizballah. Harb surmised that Aoun cannot exploit Hizballah for political gain. Rather, it is Hizballah that is exploiting

Aoun, and the group will dispose of Aoun politically when the time is right, predicted Harb.

15. (C) Harb believed any announcement by Israel of its possible withdrawal from northern Ghajar would not have any effect on the June 7 parliamentary elections. What needs to be exploited, he urged, was the ongoing rift between Hizballah and Egypt over Hizballah operatives in Egypt. By exploiting this, he said, voters would realize that Hizballah is a regional menace and more threatening than just a "resistance" force.

#### SLEIMAN NEEDS A MOMENT TO SHINE

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16. (C) Harb criticized President Michel Sleiman's domestic leadership and said Sleiman needed more "guts." Harb acknowledged that Sleiman needs a "critical moment" to assert himself. If Sleiman does not display stronger leadership in the near future, he would succumb to the pressures of a political landscape possibly controlled by a Hizballah-led alliance, Harb assessed.

#### FORMER GENERAL JAMIL SAYYED: A FUTURE POLITICAL ROLE?

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17. (C) Ambassador Naji Abi Assi, Director General of the Presidency, told us May 11 that Sleiman met three of the four recently released generals -- Ali Hajj, Raymond Azara, and Jamil Sayyed -- detained since 2005 in connection with former PM Rafiq Hariri's assassination. The meeting was labeled a

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"courtesy call" at the generals' request, Abi Assi said, and carried no political agenda. Zahle independent political figure Richard Jereissati told us later that Sayyed, a former Surete General chief, is "protected" by current Surete General officers and not by Hizballah. He noted that Sayyed asked Hizballah to remove its operatives from around his home in the Bekaa. According to Jereissati, Jamil Sayyed plans to play a future political role and believes he is best positioned to interface between Hizballah and the west.

#### ELECTION PREDICTIONS: BATROUN, KESERWAN AND OTHER BATTLEFIELDS

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18. (C) Harb was confident about winning his seat in Batroun. He worried, however, that March 14 ally and Lebanese Forces candidate Tony Zahra would have serious competition for the second seat. Harb also believed 10%-20% of voters in the village of Batroun, a Aoun stronghold where Aoun's son-in law (Telecommunications Minister Gebran Bassil) is running, are moving their support away from Aoun. Harb called Bassil a "liar," and remarked Bassil came into politics without money and was now a very rich man. Harb said that while Aoun FPM candidates Bassil and Fayege Younes were campaigning on a platform of anti-corruption, Harb's fight was for sovereignty and against armed militias.

19. (C) Harb believed Maronite Patriarch Sfeir should work harder supporting candidates in Keserwan, Aoun's home district. (Note: Ambassador will call on Patriarch Sfeir on May 14; he has been in Jordan with the Pope this week. End note.) Harb said Sfeir should put more pressure on Nemat Frem, a wealthy businessman who decided not to run in the elections, to work on March 14's behalf by encouraging his many employees to vote for the coalition. Harb also insisted independent pro-March 14 candidate Mansour Ilbon would win a seat. Harb concluded that on both sides, the candidate lists were not "the best." Harb cautioned that Future Movement leader Saad Hariri was inexperienced and did not have the best people advising him.

110. (C) Harb said Hizballah had presented new faces to run

as candidates, such as Ali Ammar in Baabda, in an effort to seat aggressive "commanders" in parliament. In Zahle, Harb confidently predicted a split of Metn's eight seats between March 14 and March 8. In battleground district Zahle, he said he hoped March 14 would win three or four of the seven seats.

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